

International Hearing Society Position Statement on the Use of Assistive Personnel in Hearing Aid Dispensing

With an increasing demand for hearing aid services in the marketplace, as well as increasing demands on the time of the individual hearing health practitioner, there is growing interest in the use of assistive personnel, such as audiology or hearing assistants and OtoTechs, in the practice setting.

While some professional organizations advocate that assistive personnel can be effectively used if appropriately trained and supervisedⁱ, the International Hearing Society maintains that patient safety and optimal outcomes can be assured only when hearing aid services are provided by an appropriately-licensedⁱⁱ hearing aid specialist, dispensing audiologist, or dispensing physician. These services, which require professional judgment, training and experience, include but are not limited to hearing testing and evaluation, amplification recommendations, custom fitting and programming of hearing aids, counseling on the proper use and maintenance of hearing aids, making ear impressions, and identifying conditions that require medical referral. State legislatures across the country have deemed these very activities to be within the scope of practice of a licensed hearing aid specialist, and that the public is best protected when only qualified and licensed individuals perform these specialized services.

It is our position that the introduction of hearing care assistants in any iteration, even when supervised by a hearing aid specialist, dispensing audiologist, or physician will not sufficiently protect the public. Furthermore, we believe that permitting assistive personnel to perform hearing aid services could result in a failure to: identify conditions that require medical evaluation, inappropriate selection and application of amplification, significant physical injury to the hearing system (such as abrading or bruising the external auditory canal, ear discomfort, or perforation of the tympanic membrane), and compromised hearing devices - potentially nullifying the consumer's warranty.

Use of these hearing care assistants poses a very real risk to the hearing health of people with hearing loss, will be detrimental to the safe and effective amplification management of persons who wear hearing aids, and will not improve consumer access to competent hearing care and amplification services. Therefore, the International Hearing Society opposes the use of assistive personnel to perform functions that are within the lawful scope of practice of hearing aid specialists, dispensing audiologists, or dispensing physicians in order to preserve patient safety and the high quality of hearing care that can only be provided by an appropriately trained and licensed hearing aid specialist or other hearing healthcare provider.

Approved by the Board of Governors on September 13, 2011.

ⁱ American Academy of Audiology Position Statement: Audiology Assistants (September 2010)

ⁱⁱ Licensed or Registered